



File Code: 1950

Date: February 19, 2009

Dear Interested Citizen and Walker Mountain Users:

This letter is to inform you that the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposal from the Department of Energy/Bonneville Power to construct a building and tower on the Walker Mountain Designated Electronic Site has been completed. Public comment is now being requested for 30 days. This letter provides a summary of the purpose and need for action and the Proposed Action. Information on how to obtain a copy of this EA is provided at the address found at the top of this letter, or on the website listed below.

Location: The project area is located on the top of Walker Mountain (elevation 7,078 feet) which is 18 miles south of the Crescent Ranger District in Klamath County, Oregon. The legal description is: T26 S, R8 E., Section 24, Willamette Meridian.

Purpose and Need for Action: The purpose of this initiative is to evaluate the proposal by the Department of Energy with Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) to construct a new 140-foot tower and 1,200 square foot two-level building. A Deschutes National Forest Plan Amendment would be required for the higher tower and larger building and necessary tree removal.

This action is needed, because BPA has been given the responsibility to operate a power transmission system within the five Northwestern states. To operate this system in compliance with the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC) and the Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC), BPA has developed a communications infrastructure to monitor, maintain, and control the substations and powerlines. The proposed Walker Mountain site, located on U.S. Forest Service land, is required to provide communications reinforcement for power system information and controls related to sites designated as Critical Infrastructure per NERC Standard CIP-002. In addition, protection and restoration of Critical Infrastructure is among the directives for Homeland Security coordination as provided in Executive Order 13228.

Walker Mountain is also part of a larger BPA project which would provide increased reliability for the operation of the power system in the vicinity of the California-Oregon Intertie. This Intertie is a critical link between BPA and major California utilities for transporting power between the regions based on load requirements.

In the past, this communications system was comprised mostly of analog microwave radios. These are no longer available on the market and therefore are being replaced with fiber optic cables and digital radios. In order to meet NERC and WECC reliability standards, the new digital communications network must be built in ring configurations. BPA telecommunication rings meet reliability requirements by providing alternate route capability for critical power system control circuits. Rings often use fiber optic cables installed on existing BPA transmission line structures. In some areas however, digital microwave radio systems must be used to complete the communication rings. The telecommunications fiber/microwave rings, would provide the necessary infrastructure to migrate from the analog microwave systems, and would allow BPA to continue to operate, and maintain power system facilities in Oregon.

BPA is in the first stage of a large multi-phase telecommunications project in Oregon to replace aging analog microwave systems. The first stage includes a cross-Cascades high capacity digital microwave radio system between Eugene and Klamath Falls, crossing the Willamette, Deschutes, and Fremont-Winema National Forests. The digital radio system will terminate at three BPA substations, Alvey



Substation near Eugene, Malin Substation near Klamath Falls, and La Pine Substation. The radio system will interconnect with existing fiber optic systems in the Willamette Valley and Central Oregon, forming two rings.

Proposed Action: The action proposed by the Department of Energy with BPA to meet the purpose and need is that the Forest Service amend the site plan in this site-specific case to allow the construction of a new 140-foot tower and 1,200 square foot two-level building (600 square ft. footprint) to allow BPA to maintain and operate the power transmission system safely and reliably. The new tower, building, and associated access road would be located in the designated communication area known as “Zone B”, away from historic resources. The new tower would be sited slightly below the mountain top and “behind” current users to the west (as seen from Highways 97 and 58). This was to preclude interference and to keep facilities consistent with visual quality standards and guidelines. Power cables will be buried along the frontage of new facilities. The radio frequencies are coordinated with National Telecommunications and Information Administration to preclude any radio interference with current site users. Given the intent of the 1995 Walker Mountain Management Plan to consolidate users and move facilities into Zone B, the larger building and tower would allow other users to consolidate and share the new facilities and allow for the removal of up to two buildings and five towers from the site in the future, including the immediate removal of one building and two towers currently located in Zone A, the Historic Resource area. Construction would begin in the summer of 2009.

How to Comment and Timeframe: Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of a notice in *The Bulletin*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this proposal. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The Regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted to the Responsible Official, Forest Supervisor John Allen, c/o Chris Mickle, PO Box 208, Crescent, Oregon, 97733. Phone: (541) 433-3216; FAX: (541) 433-3224. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 7:45 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments can be provided to District Ranger, Holly Jewkes, only during normal business hours via telephone (541) 433-3200 or in person. Those submitting electronic copies must put the project name in the subject line, and must either submit comments as part of the e-mail message or as an attachment only in one of the following three formats: Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf) or Adobe Portable Document Format (pdf) and must do so only to the following e-mail address comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-crescent@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments by electronic means to ensure that their comments have been received. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 215.6.

Anyone wishing to review the project file or obtain additional information on the project should contact Chris Mickle at (541) 433-3216. The EA can also be viewed at the Deschutes National Forest website: www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/index.html.

Sincerely,

/s/ Holly Jewkes
HOLLY JEWKES
District Ranger